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The CIA's Charles River link

Intelligence agency has long courted Boston-area academics and institutions

By Jeff McConnell
Special to the Globe

The controversy over Harvard professor Nadav Safran's acceptance of \$50,000 from the Central Intelligence Agency to run a conference at the university's Center for Middle Eastern Studies attracted wide attention last week. It is only the most recent development in the longstanding relationship between the CIA and area universities — a relationship that might be called "The Charles River Connection."

Just last April 17, CIA director William Casey made a rare public appearance at the Hyatt Regency Hotel on the banks of the Charles in Cambridge. There, he addressed a conference sponsored by Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. The subject was terrorism. Although the press had not been invited, the audience was

filled with experts on terrorism and other influential academics.

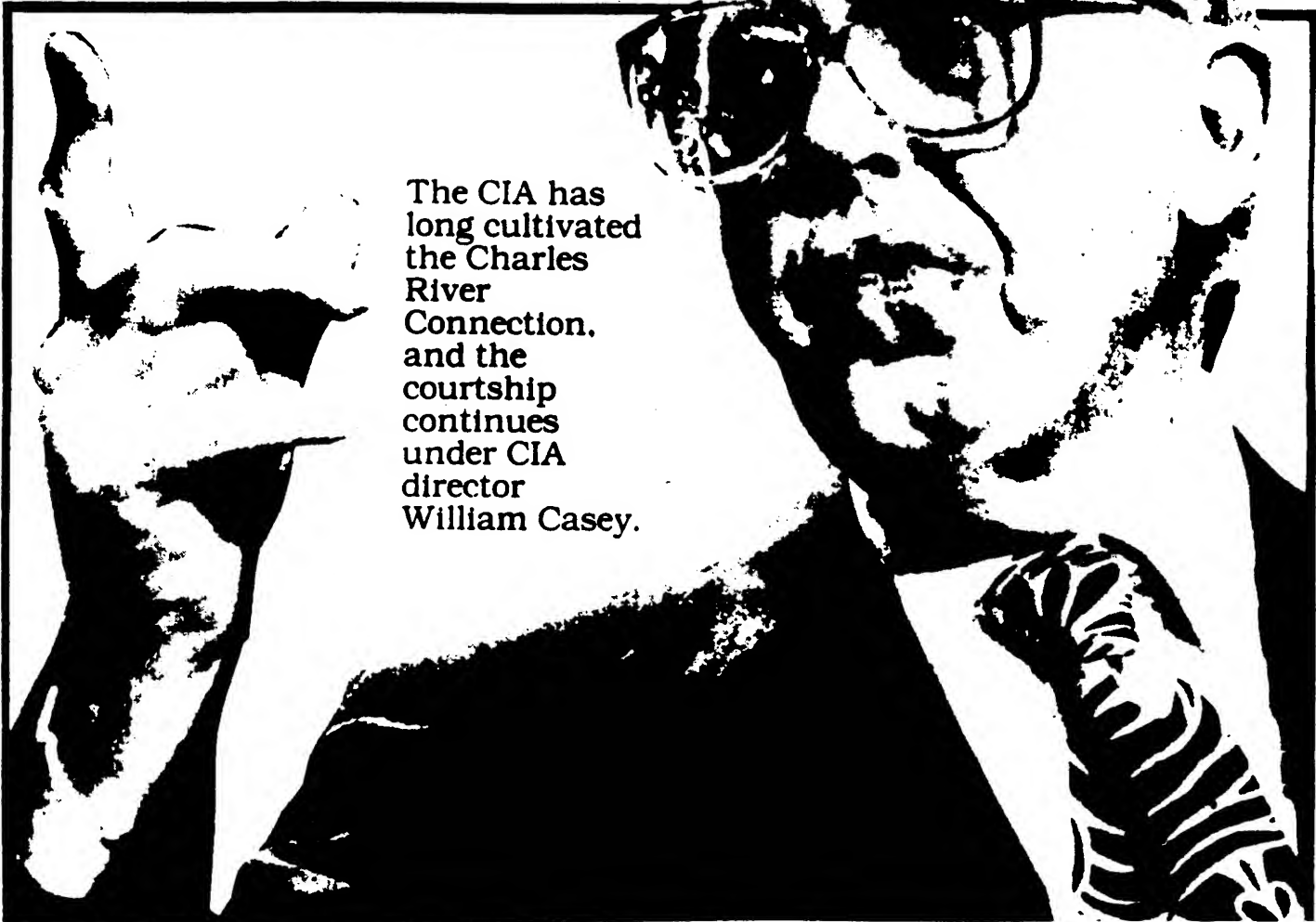
In retrospect, it is clear that Casey was using the Charles River Connection to create a prestigious forum for offering justification of controversial CIA activities.

More than a month before Casey spoke — on March 8 — a car bomb had detonated in a Beirut suburb outside the home of a Shiite leader linked by US intelligence to previous bombings against American facilities. The blast had killed 80 innocent bystanders and wounded 200 but had left the Shiite leader unharmed. Four weeks after Casey's talk, the Globe reported that the bombing had been carried out at the direction of a Lebanese hit squad set up and trained by the CIA to carry out "pre-emptive strikes" against sus-

pected anti-American terrorists. The March 8 action, however, had occurred without CIA authorization, the Globe said, and an "alarmed" Reagan administration had quickly canceled the entire hit-squad program to prevent potential embarrassment.

Casey's speech gave the administration's rationale for this controversial CIA operation: "We cannot and will not abstain from forcible action to prevent, preempt or respond to terrorist acts where conditions merit the use of force." The

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The CIA has long cultivated the Charles River Connection, and the courtship continues under CIA director William Casey.

speech was an unmistakable attempt at damage control by placing the administration's rationale in the public record. In this way, his speech was the latest in a long line of public pronouncements by CIA leaders whose purpose has been to assuage the Agency bureaucracy, often reluctant to go along with operations lacking full government support, and to lobby academics and other opinion-makers, who could provide crucial backing in case of a flap.

Almost since its creation, the CIA has carefully cultivated the Charles River Connection. In 1950, this link was formalized into Project TROY, a secret gathering of Cambridge academics charged with developing ways to overcome Soviet jamming and to reach the citizens of Eastern Europe with US propaganda broadcasts.

Within a year, the TROY effort evolved into the Center for International Studies, or CENIS, an MIT-Harvard think tank placed at MIT largely because Harvard rules prohibited university involvement in classified research. The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence reported in 1976 that the CIA "assisted in the establishment in 1951 and the funding" of CENIS "to research worldwide political, economic, and social change. . . in the interest of the entire intelligence community."

While it was unable to establish a formal institutional relationship to Harvard, the CIA sought other looser ties to the Harvard community. With top-level White House approval, the CIA set up annual summer seminars at Harvard for foreign leaders and scholars. A consulting relationship was created with the head of Harvard's Center for International Studies, Robert Bowie. Durwood Lockard, Kermit Roosevelt's deputy in the Agency's Near East Division, resigned in 1957 to become assistant head of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies where Professor Safran is now in charge. Several officials and faculty members of the Harvard Business School founded and helped to administer front organizations for the CIA.

MIT's formal institutional link was severed 20 years ago, after being exposed in the anti-CIA best seller, "The Invisible Government." Harvard's institutional ties were curtailed soon afterward when Ramparts, a muckraking magazine, revealed that the CIA had funded and controlled the National Student Association for 15 years.

Nevertheless, the Agency has fought hard since then to preserve ties to individual professors in positions of influence. Its relationship with Safran is one example.

A new link with Tufts

Moreover, in the last decade, the Charles River Connection has even expanded, moving inland to include another school administered with the cooperation of Harvard: the terrorism conference's sponsor, Tufts' Fletcher School.

The CIA's relationship to Fletcher, in fact, represents the emergence of a new institutional link, though one far less formal than that which did exist with MIT's CENIS. This new link began soon after Casey's predecessor, Stanfield Turner, took office in 1977. Turner sought to reverse the decline in CIA-academic relations brought about by Watergate and the flurry of CIA-related investigations that followed. He met as many university presidents as he could. He tried to persuade Derek Bok, Harvard's president, to modify proposed restrictions on faculty involvements with the CIA. When MIT began looking at similar restrictions, he invited Jerome Wiesner, MIT's president, to a briefing at his office in Langley, Va. Both men turned him down.

He had more success with Tufts' Jean Mayer. Although, according to the college newspaper, Tufts turned down CIA offers of more than \$200,000 to conduct studies on world hunger and the newly discovered Mexican oil fields, Mayer and Turner became personal friends.

Meanwhile, at Fletcher, the Scaife Foundation, known for promoting the CIA through a number of grants to universities and the media, sponsored a 1979 conference on intelligence. Two Fletcher professors responsible for that conference, Uri Ra'anen and Robert Pfaltzgraff, who were later involved in the terrorism conference that brought Casey to Cambridge, thereafter joined presidential candidate Ronald Reagan's advisory team on foreign policy and intelligence.

After Reagan's 1980 election, they insisted they did not want government posts, but their Fletcher colleague, W. Scott Thompson, became associate director at the US Information Agency. Stanfield Turner and, after his resignation, Casey's former deputy director, Bobby Ray Inman, joined the advisory board of Fletcher's security studies program. The CIA reportedly began recruiting as many Fletcher graduates as the State Department.

Richard Shultz, a consultant to various US government agencies concerned with national security affairs, was hired at Tufts to teach courses on the theory and practice of intelligence; few universities have such courses. For much of Reagan's first term, CIA's post of academic coordinator was even held by a Fletcher

alumnus, Ralph E. Cook. During this time, Tufts, unlike MIT and Harvard, declined to formulate guidelines on faculty ties to the CIA.

New concern on campuses

Tufts' CIA ties have been a source of controversy there. On Wednesday, picketers prevented Agency recruiters from entering the career placement building. Last year, an information session by CIA recruiter Stephen Conn was disrupted by demonstrators who formed a human wall between Conn and the audience. Several Tufts deans were later persuaded enough by the demonstrators' position that CIA recruiting procedures violated university regulations that they instituted a temporary ban on the recruiting of undergraduates. After private protests from university trustees and others, however, Mayer rescinded the ban, insisting that the deans had been without authority to initiate it.

At Harvard last week, questions about CIA sponsorship of Safran's Mideast conference were called "a matter of serious concern to me" by A. Michael Spence, dean of the faculty of arts and sciences. In an interview with the Harvard Crimson, Safran disputed whether the matter was actually a "serious concern." Harvard officials said they were investigating whether Safran had complied with rules that require the reporting of outside grants and the sharing of grant money with the university. There were also questions as to whether Safran had fully complied with the Harvard guidelines on CIA relationships in receiving \$107,430 from the CIA to help write his just-published book, "Saudi Arabia, The Ceaseless Quest for Security."

Are the concerns of Tufts' protesters and of Harvard's administrators about CIA relationships with their universities warranted?

It is difficult, obviously, to know the nature and full extent of the Charles River Connection in its present form. Still, some lessons can be learned by studying the Charles River Connection in its earlier form.

The personal papers of Max Millikan, CENIS' director during the 15 years of CIA funding, have recently been opened to the public. Those papers, together with CIA documents released under the Freedom of Information Act and interviews with people formerly associated with CENIS, demonstrate some of the dangers inherent in a university relationship to a secret government agency.

The Charles River Connection originally grew out of the Ivy League backgrounds and common war and postwar experience of its participants. As a result, CENIS' staff had more than mere professional ties to high CIA officials. In many cases, there were close friendships that went back many years. The year before he was appointed to head CENIS, for example, Millikan took a sabbatical from his MIT teaching duties to oversee the CIA's Office of Economic Research. Here, he met many of the Agency officials he did not already know from the war or from his student days at Yale. A former MIT colleague and Yale friend, Richard Bissell, had been MIT's first choice to head CENIS; later Bissell joined, then headed, CIA's Clandestine Services.

These relationships allowed hidden arrangements that did not entirely conform to the rules and understandings that were supposed to govern CENIS' operations. One cardinal rule at CENIS was that there was to be no CIA involvement in any of the center's many overseas programs. Working relationships with the governments of, say, Italy or India, it was feared, would be destroyed if it were learned that CENIS projects abroad were secretly financed or monitored by the US government.

This rule was repeated on a number of occasions to foreign governments, to the MIT administration and among CENIS staff members themselves. Yet, it was bent and sometimes even broken. Max Millikan, part of whose salary was coming at the time directly from the CIA, sent at least one account of a trip to India, and probably more, to Langley. He and several other staff members who worked abroad had paid consulting relationships with the CIA.

In the case of CENIS' Africa program, an artificial arrangement was set up in which its "domestic" side was funded by the CIA, its "foreign" side by the Carnegie Foundation. A former CENIS staff member confirmed in an interview that the rule was broken on at least one other occasion as well, although he declined to say when or where.

Another rule required that CENIS' sources of funds be identified. Even CIA money was listed in MIT documents as coming from "government contracts." However, government money was channeled to two CENIS staffers through a CIA front, apparently without any MIT official, except perhaps Millikan, knowing better.

This front, the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology, secretly financed MKULTRA, the CIA's mind-control program. One CENIS recipient, Edgar Schein, has admitted knowing the true source of his funds. But the other, Anthony Wiener, did not learn of it until MKULTRA documents were declassified in 1977. One document stated that although Wiener was unwitting, a security check was to be run "with an eye to future potential utilization of this individual."

Of all the rules governing CENIS activities, the most important was that prohibiting CENIS involvement in covert operations. Yet, from its origins in Project TROY, the center's research had an "operational" orientation.

In CENIS' first years, Millikan and Walt Rostow, then an MIT history professor, were regularly solicited by the CIA and the White House for their views on covert psychological warfare programs like Radio Free Europe. So seriously were Millikan's views taken that, in 1954, C. D. Jackson urged him to succeed Jackson as head of the Operations Coordinating Board, the White House group that oversaw covert CIA operations. CENIS was financed through the CIA's Clandestine Services. Millikan saw Richard Bissell and other covert operators on a regular basis.

The changing relationship

Still, those with firsthand knowledge of the CIA relationship have been surprised to learn that Millikan and Bissell at one point went so far as to discuss the possible use of CENIS for covert operations. In April 1960, Millikan and others were concerned about the future of CIA funding after the next president took office.

Since CENIS did work not just for the CIA, but for the entire intelligence community, there was concern that a new regime at Langley might see this particular Charles River connection as expendable. It was apparently to reduce CENIS' expendability that Millikan sought to create a closer connection.

In an internal CENIS memo, Millikan's assistant asked whether, at an upcoming meeting with MIT officers, Millikan should "mention negotiations with Bissell for cooperation with operations? A delicate topic in view of [the MIT] administration's evident worries on this score." In separate interviews, both Millikan's assistant and Richard Bissell said they

had no memories of any such negotiations.

The new Charles River Connection does not grow out of common Ivy League backgrounds and war experiences. But the potential for bending the rules remains, as well as the need for accountability.

The CIA has fought hard against legal restrictions on university relationships. Meanwhile, the courts have placed severe limitations on the kinds of information on those relationships the CIA must make public under the Freedom of Information Act.

Faced with these impediments to accountability, students, faculty, administrators and alumni concerned over improper secret ties to the government have little recourse but to act on their own. At stake could be the reputations of their universities and the relationships of confidence upon which academic freedom itself rests.

Jeff McConnell is coauthoring a book, "CIA in America," to be published next year.
